



SAN ANTONIO FIRE DEPARTMENT  
ARSON BUREAU  
CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
315 S. SANTA ROSA, SAN ANTONIO,



01/08/2024

**Regarding the SAFD Cell Phone Tower Fires investigation from 04/10/2021 - 05/12/2022:**

Throughout our fire investigation of these and all fires investigated by the San Antonio Arson Bureau, we use NFPA 921 as our guide to investigate fire origin and cause, along with NFPA 1033 which identifies the minimum job performance standards for fire investigators. NFPA 921 is a guide that has been adopted by the San Antonio Arson Bureau to be used in every fire and explosion investigation. NFPA 1033 is a standard that has also been adopted by the San Antonio Arson Bureau as the standard to be used to identify our job performance standards. The NFPA 921 and NFPA 1033 are the national guidelines and standards for fire and explosion investigations.

**NFPA 1033 (version 2022) states:**

**4.2 \* Scene Examination.**

Duties shall include inspecting, evaluating, and analyzing the fire scene or evidence of the scene, and conducting a comprehensive review of documentation generated during the examination(s) of the scene if the scene is no longer available, so as to determine the area or point of origin, source of ignition, material(s) ignited, and action or activity that brought the ignition source and materials together and to assess the subsequent progression, extinguishment, and containment of the fire.

**4.2.5**

Interpret and analyze fire patterns, given standard equipment and tools and some structural or content remains, so that fire development, fire spread, and the sequence in which fire patterns were developed (i.e., sequential pattern analysis) are determined; methods and effects of suppression are analyzed; fire patterns and effects indicating a hypothetical area or areas of origin are recognized and tested; false or refuted hypothetical areas of origin are eliminated; and all fire patterns are tested against the data, such that the area(s) of origin is correctly identified.

**4.2.6**

Examine and remove fire debris, given standard or, if necessary, special equipment and tools, so that fire patterns and fire effects concealed by debris are discovered and analyzed; all debris within the potential area(s) of origin is checked for fire cause evidence; potential ignition source(s) is identified; and evidence is preserved without investigator-inflicted damage or contamination.

These are some of the reference points from NFPA 921 that were used in the Cell Phone Tower Fire Investigations and were used to assist us in determining the fire cause of these fires and assisted us in coming to a final conclusion that the fire causes were incendiary in nature.

#### **NFPA 921 (version 2021):**

##### **23.2.1 Multiple Fires.**

##### **23.2.2 Trailers.**

##### **23.2.3 Lack of Expected Fuel Load or Ignition Sources.**

##### **23.2.6 Incendiary Devices.**

##### **23.2.6.2 Presence of Ignitable Liquids in Area of Origin.**

##### **23.3 Potential Indicators Not Directly Related to Combustion.**

##### **23.3.1 Remote Locations with View Blocked or Obscured.**

##### **23.3.2 Forced Entry.**

#### **23.4 Other Evidentiary Factors:**

##### **23.4.2 Analysis of Confirmed Incendiary Fires.**

It is through the analysis of confirmed incendiary fires that trends or patterns in repetitive fire setting behaviors may be detected. The key to this analysis is whether the fire setting is repetitive or not. This analysis may assist the investigator in the development and identification of possible suspects. Repetitive fire setting, sometimes called serial fire setting or serial arson, refers to a series of three or more (incendiary) fires, where the ignition is attributed to the individual or a group acting together. There are three principal trends that may be identified through analysis: geographic areas, or “clusters”; temporal frequency; and materials and methods.

##### **23.4.2.1 \* Geographic Areas, or Clusters.**

Repetitive fire setting activities tend to group within the same geographic location (i.e., same neighborhood), or cluster. Locating incendiary fires by utilizing computer-assisted pattern recognition systems, such as the Arson Information Management System (AIMS) or by looking at a map of the local area, can assist the investigator in identifying clusters.

##### **23.4.2.2 Temporal Frequency.**

Incendiary fires set by the same individual often occur during the same time period of the day or on the same day of the week. This occurrence may have several reasons, including the level of activity in the area, the fire setter’s assessment of his or her chances of success, or the fire setter’s routine. For example, the fire setter may pass the location (to or from work or to or from a bar) during a certain period of the day or on a certain day of the week.

##### **23.4.8 Timed Opportunity.**

Timed opportunity refers to the indicators that a fire setter has timed the fire to coincide with conditions or circumstances that assist the chances of successful destruction of the target (property) or to utilize those conditions or circumstances to increase the chances of not being apprehended.

#### **23.4.9.3.1.3**

The National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) has identified the six motive classifications as the most effective in identifying offender characteristics for fire setting behavior, as follows:

- (1) Vandalism
- (2) Excitement
- (3) Revenge
- (4) Crime concealment
- (5) Profit
- (6) Extremism

#### **23.4.9.3.2 Vandalism.**

Vandalism-motivated fire setting is defined as mischievous or malicious fire setting that results in damage to property. Common targets include educational facilities and abandoned structures, but also include trash fires and grass fires. Vandalism fire setting categories include willful and malicious mischief and peer or group pressure.

##### **23.4.9.3.2.1 Willful and Malicious Mischief.**

These are incendiary fires that have no apparent motive or those that seemingly are set at random and have no identifiable purpose. These are fires that are often attributed to juveniles or adolescents.

##### **23.4.9.3.7 \* Extremism.**

Extremist-motivated fire setting is committed to further a social, political, or religious cause. Fires have been used as a weapon of social protest since revolutions first began. Extremist fire setters may work in groups or as individuals. Also, due to planning aspects and the selection of their targets, extremist fire setters generally have a great degree of organization, as reflected in their use of more elaborate ignition or incendiary devices. Subcategories of extremist fire setting are terrorism and riot/civil disturbance.

##### **(A) Terrorism.**

The targets set by terrorists may appear to be at random; however, target locations are generally selected with some degree of political or economic significance. Political targets generally include government offices, newspapers, universities, political party headquarters, and military or law enforcement installations. Political terrorists may also target diverse properties such as animal research facilities or abortion clinics. Economic targets may include business offices, distribution facilities of utility providers (e.g., atomic generation plants), banks, or companies thought to have an adverse impact on the environment. Fires or explosions become a means of creating confusion, fear, or anarchy. The terrorist may include fire as but one of a variety of weapons, along with explosives, used in furthering his or her goal.

All 22 Cell Phone Tower Fires had similar or the same modus operandi. Some of the tower sites had chain link fences that were cut with bolt cutters. Some of the tower sites also had missing metal warning signs. All the cell phone tower fires were located in the northwest part of San Antonio, with the exception of one. Some of the cell phone sites were burned multiple times. The cell phone tower sites were burned in the same way. The fires were set

to the cell towers by a person placing ordinary combustibles in the form of clothing and at times accelerants were used. The person would wrap the clothing around the communication cables and then were ignited on fire. As the fires kept happening, we continued to find the same method of burning. At times we did have video footage of the offense but at times the cell tower sites were located in secluded areas where a person would be unable to see the offense occurring. All the cell phone tower fires were also set at night or early morning. So based on all these findings, we were able to determine that the fires were being set by the same person or persons. By using NFPA 921 as our guide, our expert opinion was that these fires were targeted and with specific intent.

After the Defendant was apprehended and a search warrant was executed at his place of residence, we found bolt cutters that were used at some of the cell tower site fires. The bolt cutters were sent to an ATF Lab, along with some of the chain link cut pieces. As a result of their examination, it was determined that the bolt cutters were used to make cuts from the samples collected from multiple sites. We also found Cell Phone Tower Warning Signs during the search. We were not able to get video footage from every fire scene, however, whenever we did obtain video footage, the person responsible for burning the towers would wear construction worker like clothing and a mask. Articles of clothing that were observed in the video footage worn by the Defendant, were found during the execution of the search warrant at the Defendant's residence. The following list is all the Cell Phone Tower fires that occurred from 04/10/2021 through 05/12/2022. The highlighted fire incidents were presented to State and Federal Prosecutors based on the physical evidence collected and linking the Defendant to those scenes. The remaining 16 Cell Tower Sites were burned using similar modus operandi, same target site, and same area of the city, however there was not enough physical evidence to charge the Defendant. The Defendant was apprehended on 05/13/2022 and has been in State and Federal custody since that date. Since the Defendants incarceration, there has been absolutely zero reported Cell Phone Tower Fires, requiring an Arson investigation. In my expert opinion, all 22 Cell Phone Tower fires were ignited by the same person or persons.

1704 SW Loop 410	SAPD21066016	04/10/2021
	SAPD21085960	05/08/2021
5400 Glen Ridge	SAPD21073510	04/20/2021
7142 Oaklawn	SAPD21100571	05/28/2021
	SAPD21184240	09/17/2021
	SAPD21160286	08/16/2021
5301 Rogers Rd	SAPD21178094	09/09/2021
1818 Hunt Ln	SAPD21099730	05/24/2021
1007 Poteet Jourdanton Hwy	SAPD21254270	12/18/2021
7900 Mockingbird Ln	SAPD21257233	12/23/2021
	SAPD22094606	05/05/2022
8982 Guilbeau	SAPD22026776	02/08/2022
5450 Babcock	SAPD21171180	08/31/2021
750 Olde Village Dr	SAPD22084867	04/22/2022
5705 Ingram Rd	SAPD22043180	03/01/2022
10310 Potrano Rd	SAPD22076342	04/12/2022
4719 Manitou	SAPD22055056	03/16/2022
12955 Huebner Rd	SAPD22092223	05/02/2022
1569 Bandera Rd	SAPD22090530	04/30/2022
918 Bandera Rd	SAPD22089799	04/29/2022
8821 Garden Brook	SAPD22103448	04/18/2022
8206 Sand Pebble	SAPD22100197	05/12/2022

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